



NEWS

U.S. Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Immediate Release: May 16, 2003

Trudy Harlow 202-513-0574

Frank Quimby 202-208-7291

Denver Conference to Kick Off Consultations on Water 2025: Preventing Crises and Conflict in the West

(WASHINGTON)-Interior and western water officials will meet in Denver on June 6 for a discussion about the reality of critical water issues in the West, Secretary Norton told Colorado leaders today.

The Denver meeting, Water 2025: Preventing Crises and Conflict in the West, will be the first of a series of consulting conferences in the West aimed at developing a dialog on means of preventing chronic water supply problems facing many communities in the coming decades.

"Locally driven, practical solutions are needed," Norton said in remarks to Colorado Senator Wayne Allard's Capitol Conference. "States, tribes, local governments, and affected communities should have a leading role in this effort."

Norton noted that water shortages in the Klamath River and Middle Rio Grande River basins demonstrate the consequences of failing to strategically address long-term, systematic problems caused by competing demands for a finite water supply.

"Crisis management is not an effective solution," she said. "We need to work together now."

During the consulting conferences this summer, Interior and other federal representatives will work with state and local officials, environmental groups, tribes, and public interest groups.

The goal is to identify the watersheds facing the greatest potential risk in the next 25 years, evaluate the most effective ways of addressing water supply challenges, and recommend cooperative planning approaches and tools that have the most likelihood of success.

A report on the recommendations of the meetings will be submitted to Secretary Norton and other Administration officials.

Norton said her Water 2025 proposal is a commitment to work with and support western governors and local communities as they carry out realistic, community-based solutions developed through these consultations.

"Interior can focus scarce federal dollars and technical resources where they provide the greatest benefits," she said. "But collaboration with private citizens, local and state water agencies, and private groups will be needed, so that dialog can take place locally to plan and invest for future needs."

President Bush's FY 2004 budget calls for an initial investment of \$11 million for such efforts.

Significant amounts of water can be conserved by modernizing water storage and delivery systems, working with state and local partners to improve water management with new technology, and targeting technical and financial assistance to help farmers, ranchers, and municipalities make more efficient use of their irrigation and drinking water.

Water 2025 also proposes spurring research and concentrating investment in critically needed areas, such as reducing the cost of desalinating sea water and impaired inland water, providing a more affordable water source for some coastal communities and rural and tribal communities.

The Secretary's blueprint encourages voluntary water transfers through water banks or other water marketing tools. These include agreements that allow agricultural producers the option to rent or lease their water to cities and towns or other users in times of drought, and still have the ability to farm in most years.

The entire proposal may be found at www.doi.gov/water2025/. Information on the conferences also will be posted to this website.